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Tighter Curb on Soviet Bloc Officials' Travel Urged

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 22 — Internal divisions in the Reagan Administration over putting further travel restrictions on Eastern bloc diplomats came out at a Congressional hearing today.

Richard N. Perle, a senior Pentagon official who supports a more restrictive policy, urged Congress to approve several laws that would limit travel by diplomats from the Soviet bloc and deny Government trade credits to countries that "steal" sensitive technology.

Mr. Perle alluded to a split between the State Department, which has generally opposed such restrictions, and the Pentagon and the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which favor them. He asked the Senate's Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations to press for mandatory travel limits because they would otherwise be blocked by what he termed "the diplomatic establishment."

25-Mile Radius Is Used

The Reagan Administration and the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence have been studying how to improve American counterintelligence and make it more difficult for Soviet espionage agents to collect information in this country.

Under present law, Soviet diplomats may travel freely only in a 25-mile radius of their office in New York, San Francisco or Washington and must get permission to leave this area. Mr. Perle suggested these limits be applied to diplomats from other Eastern bloc countries such as Poland or Rumania, who are now allowed to travel to most of the United States.

At the hearing, Senator William Cohen of Maine, a Republican, noted that the Administration had several times rejected proposals to restrict travel by Eastern bloc diplomats. "Why hasn't the Administration acted?" asked Mr. Cohen, "Because there is no will to act."

William H. Webster, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, told the subcommittee that the Eastern bloc diplomats were often "surrogates" for the Soviet intelligence service. He noted, for instance, that the Polish intelligence officers who dealt with one American spy later received commendations from Yuri V. Andropov of the Soviet Union.

He Sees a Move to Consensus

Mr. Webster acknowledged that the Administration's efforts to deal with the issue had been "excruciatingly slow," but after the hearing he said he believed the various elements of the bureaucracy were moving toward consensus.

Mr. Webster said that there were more than 2,500 diplomatic and commercial officials from the Soviet Union and Eastern bloc nations stationed in this country, and that a third of them were intelligence agents.

The State Department has traditionally argued that restrictions on Eastern bloc diplomats could lead to retaliation. Many of the Eastern bloc countries allow freer movement in their countries than the Soviet Union does.

Senator Dave Durenberger of Minnesota, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, questioned the State Department's willingness to impose the restrictions on Soviet diplomatic operations that are required under a recent law passed by Congress.

Under the law, the Administration must take steps to assure that the number of Soviet diplomats in this country is equal to the number of American diplomats serving in the Soviet Union.